



CHAPTER 1

TRAIL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY





At a time when our nation was racing to be first to land on the moon, others envisioned trails crossing our continent. A need for trails and other types of recreation facilities was clearly evident in the post-war boom. The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission was created to assess this need and in 1960 their survey ranked "walking for pleasure" as the second most popular form of recreation.

In 1965, the Secretary of the Interior directed the former Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to spearhead a nationwide trails study. In December 1966, the study concluded with the report, "Trails for America." It provided guidance and definition: "A standard of excellence in the routing, construction, maintenance, and marking consistent with each trail's character and purpose should distinguish all national scenic trails. Each should stand out in its own right as a recreation resource of superlative quality and of physical challenge." National scenic trails are to be land-based (i.e., not waterway routes) and generally are to be continuous. The report also called for federal legislation to foster the creation of a nationwide system of trails. (Earlier that year the Secretary of the Interior had submitted proposed legislation to Congress to accomplish this task.) Of the three categories of trails proposed, the report heavily emphasized national scenic trails and the role that they should play in meeting the nation's needs for trail recreation.

On October 2, 1968, President Johnson signed into law the National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543). Since 1968, eight trails, including the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, Continental Divide, Ice Age, North Country, Florida, Natchez Trace, and Potomoc Heritage, have been authorized as National Scenic Trails. The Ice Age Trail was designated and added to the National Trails System on October 3, 1980 (Public Law 96-370). Today, all of these trails are in various stages of development. Only the Appalachian and Pacific Crest are nearly completed.

As stated in the National Trails System Act:

SEC. 3. (a) The national system of trails should be composed of the following:

(2) "National Scenic Trails, established as provided in Section 5 of this Act, which will be extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass. National Scenic Trails may be located so as to represent desert, marsh, grassland, mountain, canyon, river, forest, and other areas, as well as landforms which exhibit significant characteristics of the physiographic regions of the Nation."

The trails' community philosophy holds national scenic and national historic trails as the elite of the extended trails. National scenic trails are continuous and provide access to outstanding scenery and natural landscapes, and link significant natural and cultural features by means of simple pathways. Each national scenic trail has a character and identity of its own, influenced by the landscapes through which it passes.

The long-term goal for the Ice Age NST is to establish a continuous trail that meets the federal legislative intent. It is to be developed and managed as a **premier** hiking trail, nationally significant in its scenic and recreational qualities, and closed to motorized use except snowmobiles on authorized segments. The National Park Service can certify segments, that meet this intent and other criteria, as part of the Ice Age NST. (Some segments of the trail may be open to one or more non-motorized activities in addition to hiking. Also, legitimate resource management activities sometimes require motorized use.)



As a “partnership park,” the Ice Age NST should meet local needs and blend with the character of the landscape. It also needs to exhibit continuity in character, quality, and visual appeal to sufficiently distinguish itself as a national scenic trail, which offers a higher caliber experience than ordinary trails.

Federal, state, county, and local public agencies, and private landowners participate in hosting, developing, and/or maintaining segments of the trail. Public land managing authorities may wish to enter into agreements with private volunteer organizations like the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation to carry out trail development and maintenance activities, while retaining overall management control of their lands. Whatever the arrangements, the national significance and integrity of the Ice Age NST should be clearly recognized and identified in the management objectives.

USER EXPERIENCE

Protecting the trail’s natural and cultural resources is of utmost importance. Secondly, trail designers and implementers must create the best possible recreational experience for the user. The trail experience is multi-faceted—it offers stimulation of the senses, a place for learning, a feeling of safety, recreation for the soul, exercise for the body, and overwhelming satisfaction.

The routing of the trail should stimulate the user. Variety is critical—sameness and predictability should be avoided. Around every bend, at the end of every straightaway, over the crest of every hill, through the bottomlands of every valley a new experience should be found. The sounds made by the water in a rocky brook or of a breeze sifting through a grove of white pine, the pleasant smell of apple blossoms along a fence row, the relief of the sudden coolness offered by a deep maple woods on a hot, sultry day, the thrill of an unexpected panorama, an intensely yellow field of sunflowers filtered through the branches of an oak opening, or the imprint of sumac against an autumn sky, all singularly or collectively energize senses and create long-term memories.

The trail is a place of learning, not only about the geographies and natural communities and individual species, both human and non-human, but a place where opportunities exist for understanding life and connectedness. The trail is rich in history and pre-history, both geologically and culturally. These aspects must be present to all who use the Ice Age NST so that they have the opportunity to come away from their experience enriched and enlightened.

LOOK OF THE TRAIL

The Ice Age NST should be easily recognized as a national scenic trail. It is important to maintain the aura, reputation, and national importance associated with the NST designation. The public fully expects this and deserves no less. It is important to maintain consistency throughout the entire length via standardized planning, development, implementation and maintenance. The following elements will foster consistency and pride in the trail so that visitors will leave with a positive impression:

- ▶ Quality construction of the trail, parking lots, rest areas, bridges and other structures;
- ▶ Clear and consistent signage with good attention to detail;
- ▶ A well-maintained trail with regular mowing or other vegetative control;



- ▶ Timely response to problems created by storms or routine wearing out of the infrastructure;
- ▶ Regular cleanup of litter;
- ▶ Timely response to public concern on trail related problems.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

National scenic trails should reflect a respect for the land and serve as positive examples which demonstrate that respect. Everyone associated with the trail, in any way, should exercise care not to damage the natural and cultural features that contribute to the beauty and significance of the trail. Everyone has a responsibility, to fellow human beings and to the earth, to treat the land that is temporarily in their care with great respect. To maintain the integrity of the trail's environment, planners, designers, and volunteers should observe the following points as they develop the trail:

- ▶ Adhere to applicable laws, regulations, codes and standards.
- ▶ Insure protection and mitigate impacts to cultural and natural resources.
- ▶ Identify and protect threatened, rare or endangered plants or animals.
- ▶ Place trail in an environmentally benign location as much as possible. For example, the trail should lay comfortably on the land and avoid unnecessarily steep, erodible, and/or dangerous slopes.
- ▶ Skirt or avoid wetlands unless there is a very good reason to enter them—such as bringing the user into intimate contact for interpretive or educational purposes, or because there is no other feasible trail location.
- ▶ Be aware of the trail's potential impact to larger habitat areas such as flyways, breeding grounds, and sensitive plant communities. Once the trail is developed, these situations should be monitored. The trail corridor should also be used as an opportunity to enhance biodiversity.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Ice Age NST should be designed to ensure that people with a wide range of ability levels have the opportunity to experience the significant resources that make it unique. At the same time, planners should strive to maintain the generally rustic character of a National Scenic Trail. To accomplish these goals, the trail will provide a range of opportunities to accommodate individuals who enjoy a challenge, as well as those who prefer easier, non-strenuous hiking.

Over the past few decades the number of people with disabilities participating in outdoor recreation activities has increased dramatically. (It is estimated that over 43 million Americans have some type of major disability.) Recent trends in our society, influenced by federal laws, have enabled people with disabilities to be actively involved in the mainstream of society and participate in such outdoor experiences as hiking, camping, picnicking, fishing, boating, and water-based recreation. The Ice Age NST offers opportunities for all people.

In this handbook, we refer to three general classes of accessibility—fully accessible, barrier-free, and



not accessible. Because of the length and nature of the Ice Age NST, there are segments that fall within each class. (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum criteria applied—see Chapter 2.)

Fully accessible

Some segments of the trail will be fully accessible. Ideally, these segments would be identified during the trail's corridor planning process. These segments are designed to improve access for people with mobility and/or visibility impairments. They meet a number of specifications addressing width, passing space, surface, running slope, cross slope, edging, clear headroom, rest areas, signage and information points. Some examples of accessible trail are portions of the Ice Age NST that utilize state recreation trails such as the Anaphee, Military Ridge, and Sugar River State Recreation Trails. Ice Age Trail volunteers have built outstanding segments of accessible trail at the Indian Agency House segment in Columbia County and on a portion of the Rib Lake segment in Taylor County. Other fully accessible segments occur in urban settings where the trail has multiple uses, such as the segments that follow sidewalks through the villages of Slinger, Hartland, and Lodi.

A good source of accessibility standards is *Universal Access to Outdoor Recreation*, by PLAE Inc., MIG Communications, 1802 Fifth St, Berkeley, California 94710. (Further discussion about trail construction and design standards is found in Chapter 4—particularly in Figure 1.)

Barrier-free

The majority of the trail is and will be designed to provide a more challenging experience, while still accommodating use by individuals with disabilities. Typical trail grades and surface materials are more challenging to persons with limited mobility than a fully accessible trail. However, whenever possible, the Ice Age NST should be established as barrier-free as is practical. A barrier-free trail is developed without impediments such as steps, waterbars, fords, stepping stones, corduroy, and unusually narrow bridges. These types of barriers are often avoidable by choosing another trail location or construction design. Trail segments should be made barrier-free if all it takes is a little extra work or a slightly different location. Standards discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 are specifically designed with the barrier-free objective in mind.

Not Accessible

Some segments of the Ice Age NST cannot be designed to be fully accessible or barrier free. In some cases, the glacial topography of the land and its natural surface of rocks and roots present impediments which cannot be removed without causing major impacts on the environment or drastically altering the desired character of the trail. The width of the trail corridor may be a limitation if it is narrow and doesn't allow room to create slopes that are up to accessibility standards. Other factors influencing decisions on accessibility include the protection of biological and cultural features, and the availability of funding resources to develop and maintain the trail to accessible standards.